

First Convention of Catholic Farmers

THE task ahead of the delegates was colossal. Representing groups in country centres scattered all over Victoria and the Riverina, groups which are virtually cut off from the main body of Catholic Action, operating alone, and frequently under very difficult and very disheartening conditions, they were faced with the problem of uniting all these scattered units into an organisation whose aim was to throw down a challenge to the conditions which threaten the farmer to-day.

The result was inspiring. Experienced Catholic Actionists who attended the conference were amazed at the enthusiasm of the delegates, and at the speed and efficiency with which they accomplished their task. In a remarkable session at the close of the conference forty-two resolutions were proposed, discussed and carried—resolutions which brought into being, defined the aims, structure and methods of a new organisation, dedicated to the cause of bringing the nation's rural communities to the banner of Christ the King—the National Catholic Rural Movement.

THE FOUNDATION IS LAID

The conference opened at 3.30 p.m. on February 3 with an address by Rev. Fr. Cleary on "Catholic Action and the Farmer." Pointing out the deep-rooted evils of our time—evils of war and strife, of Communism and atheism, of vice, birth-control, divorce, and the deliberate wrecking of the family—he showed that Catholics to-day are again being called into battle for their Faith; to-day they must mobilise themselves against false morality, and permeate the world with Christian ideals. The brunt of the battle has so far been borne by the clergy. But now is the time to call up reserves, now is the time for the laity to enlist in the crusade and take up the colours in the cause of Christ. To-day we are called—each one of us—to answer the same call as the Apostles—the laity must participate in the work of the Hierarchy. And that is Catholic Action.

The work ahead is not impossible. The aim of Catholic Action is the reconquest of the world for Christ. Society will be reformed, not by law, but by the reform of the individual. So the salvation of the farmer is the farmer himself. By co-operation, by steady individual effort, the work can be accomplished. But a great deal is to be done, as the Catholic farmer is faced with many serious problems. Half a century ago 44% of Australia's population lived on the land. To-day, there are barely 20%. Half our population is crowded into cities. From the Church's view this is a tragic trend. A drift is on, a drift into dangerous milieus, from the healthy open air to the poisonous air of the factory. Drifting from the country is often drifting from God.

GREAT POSSIBILITIES

Proceedings were opened on Sunday morning with a talk by Mr. B. A. Santamaria, of the National Secretariat, on "What a Catholic Farmers' Organisation Can Do." It was a comprehensive review of the problems confronting the Australian farmer, and clearly showed how such difficulties have

Formation of National Catholic Rural Movement

The first convention of Young Catholic Farmers—an event that must forever loom large in the history of the Church in Australia as one of the great moments in the march of Catholic Action—was held at Xavier College during the week-end. From humble beginnings a few years ago, Catholic Action has grown to embrace many phases of Catholic life—and the rural conference proved that Catholic Action in our rural communities is a very vital and progressive movement

been overcome by similar organisations overseas. Primarily, it is a religious movement; in the second place, it deals with economic problems. But a great deal of its work is social, proving that farming is not just an industry, but a vocation near to God. Finally, such a movement would be strictly non-political. The Rural Movement means a revival of the Catholic tradition of agriculture, which founded the magnificent agricultural tradition of the Middle Ages.

THE DELEGATES GO TO WORK

The afternoon was devoted to the investigations of the various sub-committees, whose task was to consider the situation from every possible angle. Each sub-committee made its report, and its recommendations were put before a general meeting of the delegates in the evening.

The following is a brief summary of the resolutions passed, embodying the nature, work and framework of the organisation.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL SUB-COMMITTEE

The first sub-committee was composed of the various priests who attended the conference. Their task was to consider the spiritual life of the organisation. The following recommendations of this sub-committee were carried by the conference:

(1) The ultimate solution for the rural problem is a spiritual solution, as only a spiritual force can bring about the change of heart necessary to effect a permanent reform in modern farming conditions. This consideration, it is felt, will inspire priests to more intense efforts in the training of laymen as apostles throughout the country according to the injunction of his Holiness Pope Pius XI: "It is your chief duty, Venerable Brethren, and that of your clergy, to seek diligently, to select prudently, and train fittingly these lay apostles. . . . This course, already productive of success in the past, must be followed now with alacrity." ("Quadragesimo Anno.")

(2) The unit of Rural Catholic Action will be the parish, where the lay apostles will be formed primarily by improving their knowledge in their participation in the liturgical functions of the Church, especially the Mass. They will take a special interest in the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the basis of all Catholic Action.

(3) All group meetings will include (a) the recital of the Rosary; (b) the reading of extracts from the Gospels. The guidance of the priest at group meetings is particularly desirable, as the priest is the soul of Catholic Action.

(4) As a Rule of Life, it is recommended that members should (a) recite the Rosary and the group prayer each day; (b) receive Holy Communion each month; (c) arrange a day of Recollection, or, if possible, a retreat, each year.

(5) As spiritual activities it is suggested that members should (a) learn to serve Mass and Benediction; (b) assist people without means of transport to attend Mass; (c) in isolated districts, teach the Catechism to children and help to instruct converts; (d) strive for the restoration of country family life, the consecration of homes to the Sacred Heart, and the recital of the Family Rosary.

SUB-COMMITTEE "A"

The sub-committee made recommendations as to the actual formation and organisation of the movement. The following is the gist of their resolutions, which were carried unanimously by the Convention:

1. A Catholic rural organisation to be formed, called the National Catholic Rural Movement.

2. Its aims are as follow: The restoration to the members of the rural community of a sense of their dignity and of the esteem in which the Catholic Faith holds the man on the land; to bring country Catholics together so that they may discuss the difficulties which militate against the prosperity and stability of the rural communities; to analyse their difficulties in the light of Catholic principles and see what practical remedies there are for those difficulties and practical plans for restoring Catholics to the land, forming a truly Catholic rural society; and to carry out the general work of Catholic Action within the rural community.

3. Briefly, the organisation of the movement will be as follows: The basis is the parish group; there is a regional association of parish groups with a regional council; and, finally, a general federation of regional associations with a general council and executive.

4. For the first year the Central Executive will be chosen by the National Secretariat of Catholic Action; the election of the council will not be considered until the next annual convention. The executive will im-

mediately prepare a constitution, and send copies to the various rural groups for their approval. This constitution will be drafted and sent out within a month, and replies from the groups must be received by Easter.

5. Each group will promote sales of "Rural Life."

6. The annual subscription to the movement is 2/6 inclusive of subscription to "Rural Life."

SERVICES

It was the work of another sub-committee to enquire into the services the organisation could provide its members with. It produced the following recommendations:—

1. That the executive develop a consistent plan for services such as Producers-Consumers' Co-operatives, Credit Unions, etc., as soon as possible.

2. That it will provide the groups with suitable literature on such subjects.

3. That it immediately tackle the problem of services for women on the land—domestic and nursing services, and proper education for girls destined to live on the land.

4. That it enlist the aid of the various departments of Agriculture for the movement.

5. That it examine the position in view to establishing community farms. It is proposed in this connection that (a) Each group shall submit a report on lands available in its district; (b) That a specially appointed selection committee consider such lands in conjunction with experts from the Agricultural Department; (c) That allotment of holdings shall coincide with the financial sources of each district; (d) That, other things being equal, preference will be given to married men; (e) That separate schemes for complete or partial financing be considered.

This sub-committee stressed the need for increased agricultural training in Catholic schools and colleges throughout Australia, and attention was also drawn to the work of the Catholic agricultural colleges already in existence.

THE OTHER SUB-COMMITTEES

Other sub-committees discussed the farmers' paper, "Rural Life," which is now the official organ of the movement. Problems of distribution and general management were considered. The last sub-committee drew up plans for spreading the National Catholic Rural Movement. It will be the duty of each group to endeavour to extend the movement in its own district, under the direction of the central executive.

Interviewed, the officials of the National Secretariat said that the executive had already been chosen, and that the names of the delegates would be submitted to the Episcopal Committee, and that the first meeting of the executive would be held within the next three weeks.

In the concluding speech, thanks were extended Very Rev. Fr. Hackett, the priests who attended the Conference, and the Campions, who assisted in the incidental work; and the delegates were congratulated on the great blow they had struck for Australia, for the rural community, and especially for the cause of Christ the King.



GROUP PICTURE OF DELEGATES AT THE FIRST CATHOLIC RURAL CONFERENCE.

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